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ArtPrize returns to downtown Grand Rapids

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ArtPrize returns to downtown Grand Rapids

By Jeff Karoub Associated Press nwitimes.com | Posted: Friday, September 23, 2011 12:00 am | No Comments Posted

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Sunti Pichetchaiyakul of Bigfork, Mont., installs his piece, 'President Gerald Ford visits ArtPrize,' in downtown Grand Rapids.



Even within the creative world of public art, it was an audacious plan: launch a citywide show of international artwork and let the general public be the judge.

After round two last year proved it was no fluke, ArtPrize is back for a third year and aims to draw 500,000 people to the southwestern Michigan city of Grand Rapids for the event that runs now to Oct. 9. While the winners of most art competitions are decided by a few professionals, ArtPrize allows any adult to enter and any attendee to vote for the winners.

Organizers say this year's show hosts 1,582 artists from 39 countries and 43 states displaying their work in 164 venues within three square miles of the city's downtown.

The democratic, experimental ethos the event established with its speaker series and educational events will expand this year, with musical showcases at downtown's St. Cecelia Music Center.

"The nature of the (ArtPrize) model is for the whole system to evolve and learn from itself," said founder Rick DeVos. "We want to make sure everyone knows that ArtPrize can host really any type of expression."

Still, the draw is the art and the artists whose canvas is limited only by their own imagination and, well, various municipal ordinances. Past entries have included "Play Me, I'm Yours," which consisted of multiple pianos that anyone could play, a series of portraits that were silk-screened on salt mounds and "SteamPig," a massive sculpture of a "Steam Operated Flying Porcine Craft" named Parsifal.

"It's not so much about finished product — ArtPrize is very much about process, trying things year after

year," DeVos said, adding that for some, it's "literally the first time they've called themselves an artist."

"We're trying to be that catalyst to let a whole bunch of crazy stuff happen," he said. "With that comes a lot of bad art, as well as a lot of amazing art."

About 1,580 artists will compete for nearly \$500,000 in awards, of which about \$450,000 will be awarded to the top 10 artists based on a public vote. ArtPrize also has five additional juried awards and two Special Recognition Awards.

DeVos is the grandson of multibillionaire Rich DeVos, a co-founder of direct-sales giant Amway Corp., and son of Dick DeVos, a former Amway president who unsuccessfully ran for Michigan governor as the GOP candidate in 2006. In starting ArtPrize, Rick DeVos' long-term goal was to "ignite a broad culture of creativity" in the region and state — and that vision goes well beyond art.

"I think our need and challenge in the Midwest and Michigan is to relentlessly experiment," he said. "The first half of (the 20th century) was very good to us — the industrial model served us well. It's also a very rigid, monolithic model. I think we need to get back to a place where we're embracing risk, embracing creativity.

"It's letting people identify their own objectives and goals and letting people pursue them," he said.

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